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QUESTION OF CYPRUS

Letter dated 5 November 1993 from the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith a letter addressed to you by His Excellency Mr. Osman Ertuğ, representative of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (see annex).

I should be grateful if the text of the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly under agenda item 54.

(Signed) İnal BATU
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

ANNEX

Letter dated 5 November 1993 from Mr. Osman Ertuğ
addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to refer to the statement made by the Greek Cypriot representative at the plenary session of the General Assembly on 2 November 1993, on agenda item 21 entitled "Return or Restitution of Cultural Property to the Countries of Origin".

The subject of cultural property is an issue which has been vastly exploited by the Greek Cypriot side in international fora in the absence of the Turkish Cypriot side. The Greek Cypriot representative's remarks on the cultural property in Cyprus, therefore, do not come to us as a surprise. However, his ethnocentric approach to the issue and the chauvinism and hypocrisy demonstrated by his statement have exceeded even our expectations.

According to the Greek Cypriot representative the Turkish-Islamic heritage of Cyprus does not even exist. This is evident in his deliberate omission of any reference to the rich, centuries-old Turkish-Islamic heritage of the island. In view of the fact that the Greek Cypriot side has been trying to eradicate this heritage for decades, this omission is understandable, although repulsive.

As part of the campaign to "Hellenize" the island and annex it to Greece (ENOSIS), the Greek Cypriot side had launched a virtual crusade against the Turkish-Islamic heritage of the island since 1963 in a mentality reminiscent of the Middle Ages. Archbishop Makarios, as the spiritual and political leader of this campaign, had taken a "holy oath" as early as 1950 not to "waiver from (their) policy of annexing Cyprus to mother Greece". Faithful to his oath till the end of his life he had announced later, on 4 September 1962, that "unless this small Turkish Community forming a part of the Turkish race which has been the terrible enemy of Hellenism is expelled from Cyprus the duty of the heroes of EOKA (acronym for the Greek Cypriot underground organization fighting for the union of Cyprus with Greece) can never be considered as terminated".

The forces of destruction unleashed by such pronouncements by Makarios, in addition to its human toll, also resulted in the complete or partial destruction of over 100 mosques and places of Muslim worship in 103 villages across the island. Among them were some of the holiest shrines of Islam in the island such as the Umm-Haram shrine in Larnaca, the Bayraktar Mosque in Nicosia and the Cami-i Cedit Mosque in Paphos.

The willful destruction of Turkish-Islamic cultural property in the island is also attested to by impartial observers. For instance, Mr. Ymenus van der Werff, General Rapporteur of the Sub-Committee on the Architectural and Artistic Heritage of the Committee on Culture and Education of the Council of Europe, who came to the island with a delegation of experts to study the situation regarding cultural property in both parts of the island, reported the following in para.5.3 of his report which was published as a document of the Council of Europe on 2 July 1989 under the symbol AS/CULT/AA(41)1:

> "We noted with regret the complete destruction of the main mosque in Paphos. The whole area has since been flattened to give way for a widened road junction and a car park. There is no memorial to the existence of the mosque. Below the road a Turkish bath complex remains hidden in rubble and vegetation awaiting restoration. The Turkish Cypriot cemetery by the nearby St. Sophia Mouttalos mosque is dilapidated."

The same report, revealing the falsity of Greek Cypriot allegations of deliberate destruction of cultural property in the North, states the following in its paragraph 5.3:

> "We saw no churches destroyed though St. George in Limnia (in the North) was listed as such."

In fact, the baselessness and politically-motivated nature of the Greek Cypriot allegations on cultural property had been revealed much earlier, by a respected UNESCO expert who visited Cyprus twice in 1975. In a letter he wrote to the London Times later, Mr. Jacques Dalibard observed that "there was no systematic and organized looting of the cultural heritage of Cyprus. And on the whole considering that a war took place the losses are small."

Regarding the theft involving the "Kanakaria Mosaics", which the Greek Cypriot representative mentions in his statement, it is clear that the responsibility for this cannot be attributed to the authorities of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, who are doing everything they can for the protection and preservation of the cultural heritage of Northern Cyprus without any international assistance. No country, including Southern Cyprus, is immune to the smuggling of objects of artistic and cultural value from its soil. The following extract from para.5.1 of the above-mentioned Council of Europe report, while confirming this point, also indicates who bears responsibility for such incidents of cultural robbery.

> "The south is also vulnerable as the theft of the 'Leda and Swan' mosaic from the Paphos museum shows. Unfortunately the international art market is now well aware of the existence of a well-funded market in the south for items coming from the north."

Rather than searching for ways to cooperate with the Turkish Cypriot side on the universal issue of the protection and preservation of the common heritage of mankind, it is regrettable that the Greek Cypriot side, through its representative at the UN, has again chosen the blind path of accusing the Turkish Cypriot side and Turkey on this matter. Attempting to whip up historic prejudices and stereotypes by quoting from the romantic English poet Lord Byron, shows the extent to which the Greek Cypriot side can go in its anti-Turkish zeal and cultural chauvinism.

We believe that a more appropriate quotation for Cyprus would be the following lines from another great romantic poet of universal vision, William Blake:

"Mysteries will never cease
The priest longs for war, and the soldier, peace."

I shall be grateful if the present letter is circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 21.

(Signed) Osman ERTUĞ
Representative
Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus